Proceedings of the 5th International Language, Culture and Literature Symposium

Tribute to Associate Professor Hüseyin Öz

April 24-26, 2019 Antalya/TURKEY

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5. Uluslararası Dil, Kültür ve Edebiyat Sempozyumu Tam Metin Bildiri Kitabı
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EFL Learners' Views towards the Activities of Reading to Confirm Expectations

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Abstract

In real-life contexts, when we read anything, be it a newspaper article or a supermarket brochure, we usually have some reasons and expectations about what we are going to read or we want to know something because we are just curious. Rarely do we read without any purpose and expectations, and we often know something about the topic that we are going to read about. In the classroom, then, learners can be provided with a context before they read a text so that they will have some idea about what they will read and what to expect from the text. This paper aims to discuss the preliminary findings of a small-scale study conducted to determine the views of 50 EFL learners at A2 level towards reading to confirm expectations. The study lasted 7 weeks, during which the participants were asked to respond to guess the answers to four questions, or complete a KWL chart before they read each story. The results of the study indicate that this technique appears to provide learners with a purpose to read and increase their motivation and interest as well as to contribute to their predicting skills.

Keywords: EFL, reading, pre-reading, expectations

Introduction

In addition to other skills, reading is considered fundamental to the development of competence in a foreign and second language since it is necessary to use a language for academic and professional purposes. In especially academic settings, readers will often need to read the information carefully and note down the details, which is generally called as intensive or accurate reading. Readers, therefore, study the text in detail as detailed comprehension is very important. However, while focusing on the details, "readers can easily be overwhelmed by a long string of ideas or events" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 404). Therefore, readers feel the need to utilize several strategies and techniques to aid the comprehension of the texts. These techniques might include underlying the important points, summarizing, using graphic organizers, visualizing, and making predictions.

In addition to these strategies and techniques, reading in computer-assessed environments have been found to be perceived more positively by students regarding the learning environment compared to traditional classrooms (Lim & Shen, 2006). Hypermedia texts have especially been found to be facilitating reading comprehension with less effort than print reading due to features such as contextualized images, audio explanations, and comprehension check exercises (Garrett-Rucks, Howles & Lake, 2015). Similarly, pedagogically guided web-based reading activities can improve skimming and scanning skills of students in addition to increased participation in activities and motivation (Lück,

2008). Adopting a reciprocal teaching as an instruction framework, the study conducted by Yeh, Hung, and Chiang (2017) aimed to determine how online annotations benefited 54 English language learners at a university from predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing. The results of the study indicated that the participants enhanced their reading comprehension after reading instruction with online annotations.

Despite the availability of these techniques and strategies and the tools provided by technology, when several ELT coursebooks are investigated for instructions, similar instructions might be noticed such as 'Read the text and write three sentences about true friends' and 'Read the text and answer the questions.' These instructions try to lead readers to read the passages or the text without setting a purpose for reading. However, as it is clear that in real-life contexts, we read anything, be it a newspaper article or a supermarket brochure, we usually have some reasons and expectations about what we are going to read or we want to know something because we are just curious. Smith (2004) stresses the importance of predicting by suggesting that

> We don't normally read with our minds blank, with no prior purpose and no expectation of what we might find in the text. We don't look for meaning by considering all possibilities, nor do we make reckless guesses about just one; instead, we predict within the most likely range of alternatives (p. 167).

Rarely do we read without any purpose and expectations, and we often know something about the topic that we are going to read about. In the classroom, then, learners should be provided with a context before they read a text so that they will have some idea on what they will read and what to expect from the text. 'Reading to confirm expectations' (Grellet, 1981) technique can be used to provide learners with a reason and a purpose for reading, which will also make the students motivated and interested.

Reading to Confirm Expectations

This technique can be used by teachers to put learners in the same situation where they can read a text to predict what is included in the text as well as to check certain expectations. The following example of reading activity reflects how students can be encouraged to be interested in the subject of the reading passage. The students are provided with a reason and a motivating purpose to read and asked to predict the content. The passage is about using shampoo (Breaking News English, 2017).

<p align="center">Shampoo</p>

> Could shampoo be a thing of the past? Millions of us spend a lot of time and money on it, but is it necessary? Shampoo sales have gone down a lot in the UK recently as more people are changing their hair-washing habits. A recent study by Nielsen, a consumer analyst company, said: "People are working from home…and fewer people are smoking, so [they] are using less shampoo less frequently than before." The ecosalon.com website said shampooing regularly may be the reason hair gets so greasy. Shampoo makes the scalp dry, so the head produces more oil, which you then shampoo again to remove.

> The site said: "By shampooing less often, your scalp naturally reduces its production of [oil]." However, many people say shampoo is good for the hair. Mark Coray, a former president of the National Hairdressers' Federation in the UK, says there is no benefit to not washing your hair. He said: "Shampoo is not abrasive or harsh to the scalp….The ingredients in shampoo help the hair to look so [glossy]….The hair's oil may build up so it starts to look like it is shiny...but it will not self-clean." A hair loss clinic in London, The Belgravia Centre, said: "Rinsing your hair is not going to be very effective after certain activities that make the scalp sweaty, such as exercising or using a sauna." It added: "Rinsing will also not remove bacteria or clean the excess oil from your scalp if you have greasy hair."

A 'Reading to confirm expectations' activity may start with asking learners to brainstorm the words that might be used in the text. Learners are provided with the title or the topic of the text before they read the text, which is, in this case, shampoo. The teacher can ask learners to predict the possible words that will exist in the passage above and write these on the board. In the next stage, students can be asked to share what they already know about the topic, shampoo and the things that they are not sure. Students' views can also be obtained on the possible content of the text by predicting what the text will say about shampoo. In order to predict the content of the text, learners will rely on their previous experience and knowledge (schemata) to make educated guesses about the material that they are going to read. Learners can use a graphical organizer chart such as a KWL chart (Ogle, 1986).

Things I Know	Things I am not sure	Things I would like to know

As an alternative to the use of a graphical organizer, in order to encourage students to predict the content, learners can be given several True/False questions such as the following:

1. Shampoo sales have been increasing in the UK.   T   F   NI
2. Shampooing regularly may be the reason hair gets greasy.   T   F   NI
3. Many people say shampoo is good for the hair.   T   F   NI

Learners can also be given several comprehension questions to read and asked to guess the answers before they read the text. When they are finished, they will check how many answers they got right.

1. Do people spend a lot of money on shampoo?
2. Why do people use shampoo less frequently?
3. What happens when you use shampoo very often?
4. What are the benefits of not washing your hair?

After learners select and/or write responses, they will be asked to read the text as quickly as possible, and to check their responses to confirm their expectations.

Method

The current study aims to determine EFL leaners' views towards the use of reading to confirm expectations activity before reading texts at A2 level. The study was a small-scale qualitative study conducted to determine this aim.

Participants

The participants of the study included 50 EFL learners at A2 level, who were sophomores in the department of Health Administration at a state university in Turkey. The study was conducted during the Spring Semester in 2019. Of the participants, 35 were female and 15 were male. The great majority of the participants were high school graduates, and they all shared Turkish as their mother tongue. They were aged between 18 and 21.

Data Collection and Procedure

During the General English course, which lasted 14 weeks in the spring semester, the participants were exposed to one story from the book entitled 'Stories for Reading Comprehension 2' by Hill (1985). During the first hour, reading activities were done together with the participants, followed by exercises on functional and structural features available in the reading texts. The study was conducted during the first seven weeks. Before the participants read the text before attending the class, they were asked to do one of the two 'reading to confirm expectations' activities: (a) KWL Chart to complete, and (b) Comprehension questions to be read to guess the answers before they read the text.

Data Analysis

In order to determine the participants' views towards these reading to confirm expectations activity, semi-structured interviews were conducted with randomly selected ten participants regarding their experience with these activity types. The interviews were conducted in the staff room of the faculty and lasted for about 8 minutes on average. The data obtained through these interviews were subject to content analysis and checked for consistency by another expert in the field.

Findings

Based on the analysis of the responses during the interviews, several categories and codes emerged around the theme on the benefits/features of the activities of reading to confirm expectations as indicated in Figure 1. Considering all the responses, it can be stated that the participants had an overall positive experience with reading to confirm expectations activity. The responses led to four major categories under the determined theme: curiosity and interest, predicting skills, purpose for reading, and motivation.

Figure 1. *Emerging categories and codes based on the analysis of the responses*
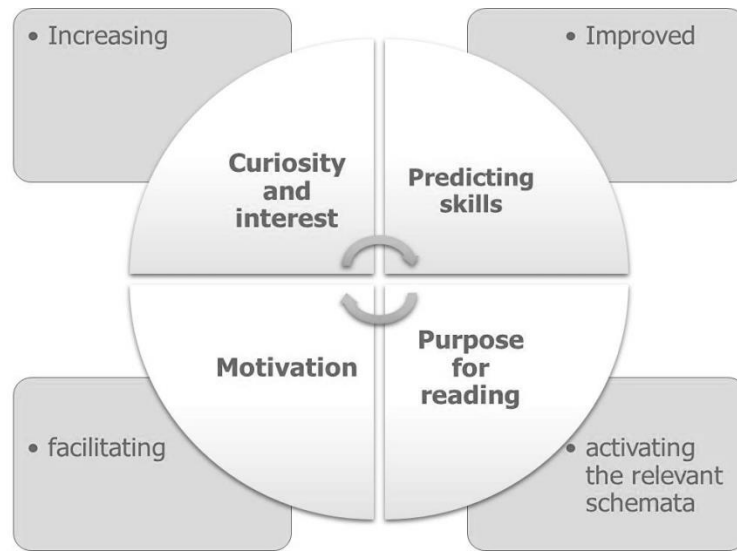
The majority of the participants interviewed (n=8) indicated that reading to confirm expectations led them to increase their curiosity about and interest in the reading text as they wished to learn whether their answers were correct before reading the reading. According to some participants (n=6), this also increased their predicting skills as they did more activities in the new reading texts. One of the participants expressed this as follows:

> *Answering questions before reading the text is not something that I do and I asked the question myself how I can answer the questions without knowing anything about the text. But as I practiced and used my knowledge about the text, I became more successful in the new texts.* [Participant 5, Male]

The views of this participant also bring out the issue on purpose for reading. It is very rare in real life that people read without a reason. Therefore, as this participant points out, when learners were provided with questions to answer or a KWL chart to complete. These activities seem to have helped the participants to use what they knew about the topics and/or event in the text and to use their knowledge.

The responses provided during the interviews also indicate that the participants were highly motivated to do the activities and then the reading. For some participants, doing the activities was a kind of game as they were eager to find out whether they were right in their guesses or responses. One participants expressed how motivated she was as follows:

> *It was a game for me and I was really motivated to read and find out what the answers would be. I think my classmates also liked the activities before reading the texts. I sometimes had difficulty in writing my answers in English but it was also very motivating, I think.* [Participant 7, Female]

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, it can be stated that the participants found doing the activities of reading to confirm expectations were useful, motivating, and interesting. This might be attributed to the fact that they were often exposed to comprehension questions in the classroom to

which they had to find answers after reading the text once or twice. In addition, as Smith (2004) points out, most learners might be required to read the texts without being given a purpose to do. Therefore, it might be put forward that reading to confirm expectations activities in the current study might have contributed to setting a purpose or a reason, creating curiosity and motivation for learners to read.

The study also indicated, based on the participants' views that, these activities contributed to the participants' predicting skills and activating their previous knowledge, in other words, schemata. KWL charts (Ogle, 1986) seem to have provided learners to organize and activate their knowledge in a graphical shape to predict the content. In real-life contexts, before and during reading, we are inclined to predict what is next regarding the information presented in a text. Therefore, practicing reading to confirm expectations through answering questions or completing a KWL chart might have got the participants' attention and increased their motivation to read further to check their responses and to determine whether these responses were in line with the text. In sum, this small-scale study revealed that KWL charts and several comprehension questions in True/False or open-ended formats might set a purpose and reason for learners to read the text and increase their interest and motivating while doing so. Given the role of these activities used as reading to confirm expectations in leading learners to have a reason and purpose and in keeping them interested in the text and motivated, it is reasonable to expect language teachers to benefit from these activities and integrate them into their pre-reading activities.

However, several challenges, notwithstanding the aforementioned benefits provided by reading to confirm expectations, were also noted such as having difficulty in writing their responses in English in both activities. This might be considered quite natural considering their level of proficiency and the lack of practicing writing in their previous classes. The participants in the current study were not allowed to answer questions or provide their responses in their L1, which is Turkish. Therefore, it might have led to more enriched responses if they had been allowed to write their responses in Turkish, which should be considered a suggestion for further research. Moreover, there are some other reading activities which can be done before reading. Among these are pre-teaching unknown vocabulary, discussion questions, and using pictures to talk about the topic, with which learners are provided the opportunity to activate their prior knowledge and to explore their experience (Castillo & Bonilla, 2014). Different pre-reading activities can be compared and contrasted with the ones used in this study, and their effects can be discussed within the students' performance and gains in addition to their perceptions, views, and suggestions.

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